

# Life at the Manzanar Camp for Japanese-Americans in WWII

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TOP: Japanese-Americans were forced to live in barrack homes at internment camps like this one in the United States during World War II. MIDDLE: A typical interior scene in one of the barrack apartments at this center. BOTTOM: Guayule plants beds at the Manzanar Relocation Center. The guayule plant was a natural source of rubber, which was needed for the war effort. Photos by: Dorothea Lange, courtesy of U.S. government.

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, led the United States into World War II. It also radically changed the lives of 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry who were living in the United States at the time.

The attack worsened discrimination against Japanese-Americans. It also created fear among some people in the government, military, news media and public, who worried about being sabotaged and spied on by Japanese-Americans.

In February 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order authorizing the removal of anyone who might threaten America's war efforts. As a result, the government gave everyone of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast only days to decide what to do with their houses, farms, businesses and other possessions.

## Long rides to unknown locations

The Japanese-Americans did not know where they were going or for how long. Each family was assigned an identification number and loaded into cars, buses, trucks and trains. They took only what they could carry and left the rest behind. They were transported to 17 assembly centers in Washington, Oregon, California and Arizona. From there, they were moved to relocation centers.

Ten war relocation centers were built in remote deserts, plains and swamps of seven states: Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah and Wyoming. By November 1942, the relocation to these prison camps was complete.

## Many were U.S. citizens by birth

Manzanar in California was a typical camp. About two-thirds of all Japanese-Americans at Manzanar were American citizens by birth. The others were not citizens, but most had lived in the United States for many years.

The first Japanese-Americans to arrive at Manzanar in March 1942 were men and women who volunteered to help build the camp.

The 500-acre housing section was surrounded by barbed wire and guard towers with searchlights. Military police housing, a sewage treatment plant and farm fields filled the remaining 5,500 acres.

By September 1942, more than 10,000 Japanese-Americans were crowded into the camp. They shared bathrooms, a laundry room and an eating area. A tiny "bedroom" was shared by eight people. These rooms were barely furnished. They contained little more than an oil stove, a single hanging light bulb, blankets and straw-filled mattresses.

### **Detainees had jobs, worked hard**

Rosie Maruki Kakuuchi was 15 years old when she was sent to Manzanar. She said the lack of privacy was one of the toughest things about living there.



Those imprisoned in the camps tried to make the best of a bad situation. They established churches and clubs. They participated in sports, music and dance. They even published their own newspaper called The Manzanar Free Press.

Most prisoners worked in the camp. They dug irrigation canals and ditches, grew fruits and vegetables, and raised chickens, hogs and cattle. They made clothes and furniture for themselves and supplies for the military. They also worked as doctors, police officers and teachers.

### **Military was also affected**

About 5,000 Japanese-Americans were serving in the U.S. Army when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. The military soon called for another 5,000 volunteers, but in January 1942, Japanese-Americans were classified as "enemy aliens." They would not be drafted for military service again until 1944.

Americans felt fearful and worried as the country entered the war and Japanese-Americans were moved to the relocation centers. There were protests and disturbances at some centers. At Manzanar, two people were killed and 10 were wounded in the "Manzanar Riot" in 1942.

Tensions grew in 1943 when the government began asking the Japanese-Americans at the camps to take a "loyalty" test. The prisoners were asked if they would serve in combat and if they would swear complete loyalty and allegiance to the United States. Some older prisoners answered "no," because they were not allowed to become U.S. citizens. These individuals were sent away to a maximum-security segregation center, with even stricter rules than Manzanar.

### **Camps slowly closed**

When the war turned in America's favor, Japanese-Americans were allowed to leave the camps. Church groups and others helped them find places to live and jobs across the country. Many Japanese-Americans were able to attend college.

At least 11,070 Japanese-Americans were processed through Manzanar. The last few hundred prisoners left in November 1945, three months after the war ended. Many of them had spent more than three years at Manzanar.

### **Chronology**

1869: First known Japanese immigrants to U.S. settle near Sacramento, California.

1913: Alien Land Law prohibits Japanese non-citizens from owning land in California and imposes a three-year limit on the leasing of land.

1924: Immigration Exclusion Act stops Japanese from immigrating to the United States.

1941: U.S. enters World War II after the Pearl Harbor attack on December 7.

1942: Executive Order 9066 authorizes relocation and/or imprisonment of anyone who might threaten the U.S. war effort.

1943: U.S. Army forms 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a segregated unit for Japanese-Americans who served in Europe.

1944: Supreme Court upholds the constitutionality of evacuation based solely on national ancestry while separately ruling that loyal citizens cannot be held against their will.

1945: World War II ends with Japan's surrender on August 14, and the Manzanar War Relocation Center closes on November 21.

1952: Japanese are allowed to become U.S. citizens.

1988: U.S. Civil Liberties Act grants a \$20,000 payment and an apology to 82,000 former prisoners.

## Quiz

- 1 According to the article, teenager Rosie Maruki Kakuuchi did not like conditions in the Manzanar camp. Which of the following MOST LIKELY influenced her view?
- (A) She likely did not know much English beyond a few phrases.
  - (B) She sided with Japan in the war rather than with the United States.
  - (C) She had lived in a home with a private bathroom.
  - (D) She did not want attend school in Manzanar.
- 2 Which statement would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
- (A) The first people to arrive at Manzanar were the volunteers who helped build it.
  - (B) Japanese-Americans were unsure of where they were being taken when they left home.
  - (C) Manzanar was overcrowded and offered little comfort or privacy to those who were taken there.
  - (D) The Manzanar Free Press was established by Japanese-American prisoners.
- 3 In 1944, the Supreme Court ruled that the government could not hold loyal citizens against their will. That same year, President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) began to close the camps for Japanese-Americans. Which of the following MOST LIKELY caused the Supreme Court to rule against Japanese-American camps?
- (A) President Roosevelt wanted to close Japanese-American camps.
  - (B) Japanese-Americans would not obey and report to government camps.
  - (C) Japanese-Americans protested and opposed being sent to government camps.
  - (D) The American government found no evidence of Japanese-Americans spying.
- 4 Which of the following answer choices describes two main ideas in the article?
- (A) The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor caused the United States to enter into World War II; after the war ended, the Manzanar War Relocation Center closed.
  - (B) Many Japanese-Americans were sent to relocation centers during World War II; at Manzanar, prisoners worked to make the best of a bad situation.
  - (C) Many Americans believed that Japanese-Americans were spying on the United States; this belief caused discrimination against Japanese-Americans.
  - (D) Some Japanese-Americans in camps were asked to take a loyalty test; many of them were allowed to leave and find jobs and homes.
- 5 Which of the following statements does the chronology BEST support?
- (A) Japanese-American camps emerged from of a history of discrimination.
  - (B) Japanese-Americans born in Japan became American citizenship easily.
  - (C) Japanese-American spies planned a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor.
  - (D) Japanese-American camps were a necessary emergency response.
- 6 Japanese-Americans would be MOST LIKELY to agree with which of the following statements?
- (A) Living in the relocation centers would have been tolerable for Japanese-Americans if there had been more privacy.
  - (B) The United States government respected the contributions of Japanese-Americans during World War II.
  - (C) Japanese-Americans posed a significant threat to the lives of Americans during World War II.
  - (D) The relocation of Japanese-American families during World War II intensified feelings of anger and racism.
- 7
- Based on the article

e, which of the following is true about Japanese-Americans in government camps?
- (A) Most had arrived in the United States recently and would have rather returned to Japan.
  - (B) Most were citizens born in the United States rather than immigrants.
  - (C) Most did not have citizenship due to a law passed in 1924.
  - (D) Most were not loyal to the United States during the war with Japan.

8 Why did President Roosevelt MOST LIKELY authorize the removal of Japanese-Americans from their homes?

- (A) He was afraid that Japan would succeed in bombing other countries in World War II.
- (B) He was afraid that Japanese-Americans would endanger war efforts of the United States.
- (C) He believed he could anger the Japanese government by sending Japanese-Americans to camps.
- (D) He believed that Japanese-Americans should be drafted for military service at Manzanar.